

THE GREAT TOBACCO WAR IN KENTUCKY

Revolt of Farmers in the Blue Grass State Against the Tobacco Trust.

HAD MANY TRAGIC FEATURES.

How the Fight Was Forced on the Growers—Night Riding and Its Crimes.

Kentucky is the tobacco State. While she produces hemp, wheat, corn, horses, hogs and cattle in abundance and with profit, tobacco is her great cash crop. Of the 110 counties (mountain, blue grass and Western) there are few if any which do not consider the plant a staple. It is the crop which costs the most to produce, calls for the greatest amount of labor, most rapidly debilitates the soil and, under normal conditions, brings the greatest returns.

Kentucky may be divided into four large districts, with four separate and distinct types of tobacco, none competing with the others. In the extreme western part of the State is the dark tobacco district (which includes about twenty counties in Kentucky and ten in Tennessee). There the growers are organized into what is known as the Planters' Protective Association, with headquarters at Guthrie. The tobacco grown in this district has a very large, almost black leaf. While some of it is used in domestic manufacture the bulk of the crop is exported to England.

Then comes the stemming district of seven or eight counties, so called because the stem is removed from the leaf before marketing. Nearly the entire crop is exported to England, France and Italy.

The Green River section includes six or seven counties and produces a tobacco midway between the dark tobacco and the white burley. It is used in both the domestic and export trade.



PROCESSION OF NIGHT RIDERS IN KENTUCKY.

By far the largest district is that where white burley is grown. This includes from forty-two to fifty-five counties and, roughly speaking, embraces all of the State east of Louisville, Maysville and Mt. Sterling. Two counties in Indiana and three in Ohio also produce white burley tobacco. This peculiar grade can be grown nowhere else in the world. It is used almost entirely in domestic trade and from it the very highest type of plug chewing tobacco is made.

The tobacco producers of the stemming, Green River and white burley districts are very generally organized under the Kentucky Union of the American Society of Equity.

The American Society of Equity is a national organization of farmers. Its objects are the improvement of methods of agriculture, the introduction of new and improved seeds, social intercourse, and, more than all else, the securing of fair and equitable prices for farm products. In many respects it is to the farmer what the trades union is to the craftsman.

The American Tobacco Company, otherwise known as the Tobacco Trust, is an organization of capital which well high controls the manufacture of tobacco in this country, which is gradually invading the retail cigar and tobacco trade, and which has such strength and such extensive ramifications that it dictates the price of raw material to the grower.

So much for the fundamentals of a condition which has produced the present tobacco war in Kentucky.

When the tobacco market was an open one—that is, when there was opposition among the bidders for the raw leaf—the price of white burley was about 15 cents per pound, and of the dark tobacco about 8 or 9 cents. Then came the Tobacco Trust. Opposition in bid—was eliminated and prices

were hammered down and farther down until the dark tobacco was bringing 3 cents and the white burley 6 cents. Such a reduction meant ruin for the farmers. The actual cost of production, reckoning a man's labor at \$1 per day and a team's services at 50 cents, would be just about this figure. There was no allowance for the terrible drain upon the land itself, for the fact that in the rush seasons the farmers were forced to hire extra help at \$1.20 to \$2 per day, or for the fact that the work is the hardest and most exacting of all farm labor, and that much of it must be done in the most inclement season.

The producers had nothing to say as to the price. The trust made its offer and it was a case of take it or leave it alone. The farmers were rapidly being reduced from an independent and prosperous condition to one of almost servitude and with actual want staring them in the face.

Finally the dark tobacco growers organized as the Planters' Protective Association and pooled their tobacco. They held out for two years before selling a pound. Then the raw material in the market became exhausted and the trust was forced to come and buy at the pool price of 9 cents instead of its own price of 3 cents. These organized producers and the American Tobacco Company are now working under a fairly harmonious agreement and have been for two years.

With this splendid example of the power of union before them the oppressed and individually helpless farmers of the great white burley district in November, 1906, organized as the Kentucky Union of the Society of Equity. Each member agreed to pool his crop with the others and to sell only through the officers of the organization. Warehouses were purchased or erected in various places. The pooled tobacco was either brought to these warehouses or stored in the producers' barns. At Winchester samples of all pooled tobacco were kept and the Equity farmers demanded that the purchaser, instead of going to the farmers or having the farmers come to him, should purchase by sample of the Equity officer. At the beginning the Equity people, when the Trust price was 6 or 6½ cents, made out a price list which would make the average price on all grades of an average crop 15 cents, some higher and some lower.

trust has come forward and bought 1,000,000 pounds of pooled tobacco at Equity prices and the independent manufacturers are buying a little.

With about 100,000,000 pounds of burley tobacco pooled, the Equity growers decided that it would be inadvisable to increase the store until the trust was forced, from lack of other supply, to purchase what is already in hand. Their slogan became "No tobacco crop for 1908," and it is the effort to enforce this mandate upon its members and upon other growers which has resulted in the night riding which has attracted so much attention.

The Equity owners recognize the hardship which would be incurred by cutting out the crop of 1908, but they agree that it is better to receive 15 cents a pound for two years' crop than to be forced to accept about 6 cents for three years' crops. Meantime they would turn their attention to other crops and, best of all, give their lands a rest.

The sympathy of the great mass of the people is with the farmers in their effort to force the trust to pay a reasonable and remunerative price for tobacco. Defeat means starvation prices and continued scarcity of money. Victory means prosperity for grower and merchant alike. For this reason the merchants are straining every resource to carry their tobacco growing customers on their backs and the farmers are cutting expenditures to the lowest possible limit. It is a struggle in which practically all of Kentucky has a vital interest. Everywhere one goes he hears word of commendation for the Equity; the only condemnation is for the excesses to which the night riders have gone.

But there is an excuse for the night riders. Their mildest action is, of course, illegal, but it is understandable. The law is slow. In every community in which there is a great struggle for betterment, with consequent deprivation and sacrifice, there are always those whose cupidity prompts them to take advantage of the situation and reap a personal benefit, even at the cost of adding the common enemy. These individuals, though strictly within their legal rights, are necessarily not popular with their neighbors, and to an extent these neighbors are excusable when, persuasion failing, an appeal is made to coercion. There is the law of the statute books; there is also the law of the community. In fraction of the one may be punished in the courts; defiance of the other is more difficult of correction.

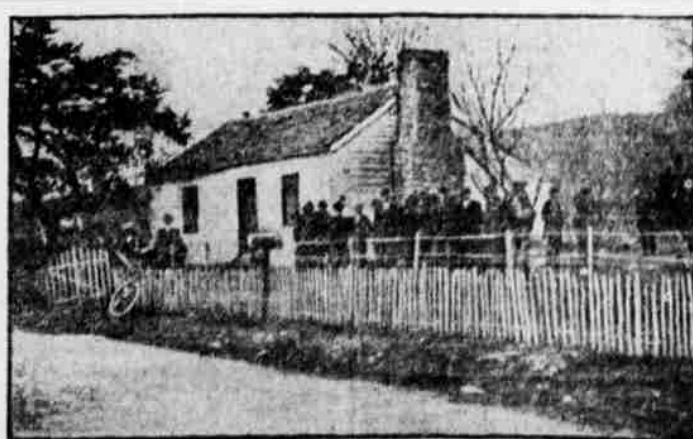
So long as the night riders confine themselves to the raking of tobacco beds there was little criticism. When valuable warehouses were burned there was a general expression of indignation and condemnation. When murder was resorted to the manhood and decency of Kentucky were roused to a height which demanded that all night riding must cease and that the criminals who had gone to such terrible excesses must be discovered and punished.

It is not difficult to account for night riding in its ineptness. And from this basis perhaps it is easy to understand how irresponsible, dare-devil young men, prompted by a love of rough adventure and occasionally by personal spite, took advantage of conditions to commit excesses and outrages.

Accompanying the night riding which has been such an unfortunate feature of the tobacco producers' fight against the trust there has been more than one tragedy, but the one which attracted the most attention and created the greatest indignation was the killing of Hiram Hedges by some member of a masked mob.

Hedges was a hard-working, honest man for whom it has been a long struggle to support his numerous family. He was a man of decent morals, was counted a good neighbor and was not known to have had an enemy. Like all farmers in his part of the State, he was a tobacco grower, but in a small way. In his immediate neighborhood there had been very little organizing among the farmers and he was not an Equity man. One night he was visited by a mob of about seventy-five men, called to the door, accused of planting tobacco, and in the presence of his family was killed with shot.

Occasionally a detective tries to disguise his breath with a clove.



HEDGES' HOME, WHERE A NIGHT RIDING TRAGEDY OCCURRED

Circumstantial Evidence.

Sir A. Conan Doyle, at the Authors' Club Christmas dinner in London, related that in America some colored people were keeping the festival of Christmas and they were told to hang up their stockings at night. One poor fellow had no stockings, and so he hung up his trousers. In the morning he was asked what he had got. He replied: "I guess I got a man, for my pants are gone."

Woman Railway Workers.

In the South of France one may see, at the little wayside stations, women attending to the signals of the half dozen daily trains; while the companies regularly economize at the level crossings by employing female labor. The husband can be seen at work at his vines upon the hillside, while the wife waves the green flag and keeps the children quiet.—Detroit News-Tribune.

When Mrs. Carrie she became she didn't quite forget. She took her low, sweet voice along, and has it even yet. But if hubby's just a little slow to answer to her call. She can jar him with a voice that cracks the paper on the wall. —Chicago Tribune.

Too Plain.

"Norah," said her mistress, "I don't mind it if the policeman on the beat drops into the kitchen once in a while of an evening, but I object to your entertaining such shabby and disreputable looking fellows as the one who was there last night."

"He's all right, m'm," said Norah. "He's me plain clothes policeman."

Lightning in South Africa.

In South Africa, where thunderstorms are terrific, lightning often strikes the beds of ironstone, and blue flames, sometimes firing buildings, are alleged to play about such ironstone outcroppings two or three hours after a storm.

Terrible Woman.

"My wife," growled Kadley, "is the most forgetful woman."

"Yes," mildly inquired the polite visitor.

"Yes, she can never remember in the morning where I left my pipe the night before."—Philadelphia Press.

A Slow Process.

"Wigs went out this morning to clean off the snow."

"Yes."

"Every two minutes he'd run in the house to warm up."

"Did he clean off the snow?"

"He finally cleaned off the little that he hadn't carried into the house on his feet."

In the Long Ago.

Cardinal Wolsey had fallen. "I was trying to dodge an automobile," he explained, "and a roller skater ran into me."

The historians, however, with singular obtuseness, have persisted in placing the blame on Henry VIII.—Chicago Tribune.

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Uncle Allen.

"Some men," muttered Uncle Allen, "sparks after the tiresome speaker is sat down, 'remind me of an old man mill that's running with empty hoops. Their wheels keep on going, but they don't turn out any grit.'"

Closing the Incident.

The famous ball player was being through the sporting columns of the newspapers.

"I see they're quit mentioning me," said. "I may as well sign."

Upon doing which he secured one mention in the newspapers.

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